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Fish and Wildlife Service Needs More Information on Lampreys; Will Continue Working with Others to Conserve These Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that a petition to list four species of lamprey does not contain sufficient information to warrant further review at this time. The agency said it will continue to work with others on efforts to conserve lampreys and their habitats.

“Little detailed information is known about these species,” said Dave Allen, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region. “We applaud the ongoing conservation efforts that tribes, states, federal agencies and other parties are carrying out for these species. We are asking interested parties to continue to gather data and conduct research that will enhance the understanding of lampreys and the nature of their conservation needs. Efforts to address restoration targeted at lamprey, such as the recent Lamprey Summit sponsored by the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission, need to continue.”

The petition, submitted by 11 environmental groups, asked the agency to list four species of lamprey: the Pacific lamprey, the river lamprey, the western brook lamprey and the Kern brook lamprey. The petition cited population declines and said lampreys are threatened by artificial barriers to upstream and downstream migration, dewatering and habitat degradation, among other threats.

Lampreys are eel-like aquatic vertebrates. As adults some are only a few inches in length, while the Pacific lamprey can reach two to three feet in length. Born in fresh water, the Pacific lamprey and the river lamprey migrate to sea to feed parasitically during their adult life and return to freshwater to spawn. The western brook lamprey and the Kern brook lamprey spend their entire lives in freshwater and are never parasitic. All four species of lampreys spend most of their life cycle as a larvae buried in the bottom of streams in slow moving water. Pacific and river lampreys occupy many of the same streams as Pacific salmon and are a food source for

many fish, birds and mammals. To many West Coast Indian tribes Pacific lampreys have cultural significance and value as a food source and medicine. Pacific lampreys range from Baja California, Mexico, around the Pacific Rim to Japan. They have been caught as far as 62 miles offshore and at depths up to 2,600 feet.

While declines of lamprey species' populations in some instances have been documented, the Fish and Wildlife Service finds that the petition does not provide the required information to indicate that listing the four lamprey species may be warranted. In the case of the Pacific lamprey, the petitioners provided information documenting a reduction in the species' range and numbers, but they did not provide information describing how the portion of the species' petitioned range (California, Oregon, Idaho and Washington) or any smaller portion is appropriate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. For the other three petitioned species, the petition suggested they face threats similar to those faced by Pacific lampreys but it failed to provide specific information on those threats. Although little information exists on the status of Kern brook, western brook, and river lampreys, some of the threats that affect Pacific and river lampreys are not applicable to Kern brook and western brook lampreys because those two species of lamprey do not migrate to the ocean. The Fish and Wildlife Service, therefore, finds that the petition did not provide sufficient information to warrant initiating a status review at this time.

The petition to list the four lamprey species was filed in January 2003. The Fish and Wildlife Service conducted an initial review of the petition to determine whether an emergency listing was warranted and decided in March 2003 that an emergency situation did not exist. Due to limited funds, no further work was done at the time. The petitioners sued the agency and in November 2004, the agency reached an agreement with the petitioners to issue a 90-day finding on the petition by December 20, 2004. Today's announcement constitutes the agency's 90-day finding. The full text of the finding is contained in two separate documents, which can be found at <http://pacific.fws.gov/ecoservices/endangered/listing/default.htm>. Both documents will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 27, 2004.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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